

The Fall Within the Frame of the History of Salvation

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (*Genesis 1:1*)

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (*Genesis 1:27*)

God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (*Genesis 1:31*)

Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ; and man became a living being. The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden ; and there He placed them whom He had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food ; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (*Genesis 2:7-9*)

The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely ; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." (*Genesis 2:16-17*)

These verses shed light on the beginning of the history of the world and of mankind — but not in the sense of a scientific report. This was not the intention of the inspired author. God wants to show us the spiritual message that we can find in his creation. He did it through a man who wrote under the conditions provided by his era, his culture, his language, his own way of thinking and view of the world. But the truth expressed in his words can be understood by all people of all ages, especially if they open themselves for the work of God's Spirit. [1]

God saw that all he had created was very good! This included humans.

What happened then? What disturbed the order of creation and destroyed its harmony? We can find the answer in the following verses:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed , has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat ; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.' "

The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate ; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked ; so I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked ? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat ?"

The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."

Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done ?"

And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat all the days of your life; And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed ; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you will bring forth children ; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you."

Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field ; By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken ; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."

Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil ; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever "- therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life. (*Genesis 3:1-24*)

We can understand from the passages mentioned in the beginning of this article (*Genesis 1-2*), that creation includes the free will of man, which is the precondition of independent existence and of the dialogue of love. In other words, God, in his love, created man to be capable of love. However, for this to become reality, man has to deal with this gift he received in accordance with the order of creation. That is, he must accept the gift of life with joy and not treat it like stolen goods, clinging to it as if it were his own property. Instead we are to give it back to our Creator voluntarily, as our response in the dialogue of love. Only in this self-giving dependence on the Father can a person's own unique personality, his "self", develop through love to be as noble, rich and independent as God planned it to be.

In this way he can live in harmony with his Creator, with other people, with his surroundings and with himself. But this did not happen.

Man realized that he was a unique "self", distinct from his Creator. This realization however didn't lead him

to bow down in front of his Creator as the Source of Life, as his Lord. He didn't want to become an "adult" by continually holding onto the hand of God who wanted to lift him up to Himself, but instead developed a wish to become like God, that is, he wanted to be God. He listened to somebody who called his attention to this "great opportunity", to that which is a delight to the eyes and desirable.

The serpent said to the woman, You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. (*Genesis 3:4-5*)

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate ; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. (*Genesis 3:6*)

That's "all" I have to do—to decide that I will not listen to God? (Well, what kind of god is he, who jealously withholds his knowledge from us and prohibits us from gaining it?) Whether or not we put it into words, by wanting to realize myself independently of God, I put myself in his place. What's more, I oppose him directly when I make my own will the absolute standard of good and bad. With this decision mankind (the first humans, as well as you and I) rebelled, turned away from life, from joy, hid from God—died. The avalanche started. Sin had caused the tragedy of mankind to begin.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned. (*Romans 5:12*)

The encounter between God and man in the garden expresses their nearness to one another, the close relationship between them. Man's life has an aim and a calling. By working in the garden he was to rule—in a good way—over all that was entrusted to him. He was to guard it, to benefit from its fruit by living in harmony with himself and his environment and by taking care of his relationship with God.

The consequence of the first sin is that man hides from God. He becomes alienated from him. Fear falls on him. Fear which nobody taught him. Where does it come from, then? Is it a strange by-product of matter or a twist of fate? No. It is a natural reaction following from the order of creation. Man "feels" that he has done something bad! But because nobody likes to be afraid or acknowledge that he is bad, one sin follows the other: he tries to explain his sin. He shifts the blame to others and ultimately blames God.

The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." (*Genesis 3:12-13*)

- the woman you put here with me (why did you give such a woman?)
- the woman gave me
- the serpent deceived me (well, sometimes we realize that we deceived ourselves or others deceived us, but it is often too late)

Through sinning man alienates himself from other people. He degrades them to be the aims or objects of his own interests.

Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. (*Genesis 3:16b*).

Since man contradicts his Creator, he contradicts his own being as well. His original being is divided.

What does it mean to be divided? Man received his spirit from God so that he can rule over himself in cooperation with God in a sensible way, maintaining the physical-spiritual unity of his person. However, when our will is directed towards something finite (i.e. towards ourselves) or other less important things instead of towards the infinite Good (i.e. God), then we become slaves of our own idols instead of finding God who offers us the freedom of love. But at the very latest we will lose all these things at the moment of death. Then what remains is nothing but our exploited ego. **This is Hell.**

It's like being born into a royal family. No-one earns this right by his own merit. You are born the heir of the king. Then, as if it was a matter of course, you say, "Give me my inheritance, it is mine! I'll do with it what I want. I will show you how one should treat it." Just like the example of the prodigal son:

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. (*Luke 15:11-24*)

Yes, he made it as far as the pigs' trough because he stubbornly followed his own ideas. And we do the same. As the Scripture says: we have all sinned, "*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way ...*" (*Isaiah 53:6*).

This is not the fate God wanted us to have. We caused it ourselves.

A further consequence is that when man behaves as if he were sovereign instead of being dependent as a creature, his own interest becomes his very first aim. In this way he alienates himself from his surroundings because he sees the gifts of nature which God gave him first of all through his interests, too. That means he does not live with them in harmony, ruling over them in a sensible way according to God's original plan, but he often abuses or destroys them as a tyrant.

So the thing that causes the tragedy of man is sin, i.e. contradicting God and his will.

But why did God not hinder it, why didn't he do something about it? He did!

... but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die. (*Genesis 2:17*)

We have all heard the voice of our conscience speaking to us many times, "Don't do it!"

Nevertheless we did it. Not because Adam did it. Not because others deceived me. All these things do influence us, but they do not make me sin; I sin because **I want to**.

This, however, contradicts the order of creation. The only way for a created being to live a fulfilled life is by remaining in complete dependence on his Creator (like a child depends on his parents). Every single sin we commit expresses and confirms this striving for false independence of God. This is the way sin spread throughout human history (*Romans 5:12-21*). A sinful surrounding came to existence that influences everybody and in which people mutually strengthen each other's sinful inclinations. *Sin became a power that formed history!*

At this point we do not want to provide a detailed refutation of the false teaching of Total Depravity which claims that man is totally incapable of doing good. Although the first human's sin ruined him, it did not destroy his free will. Though weakened, he is still capable of choosing to do good. Indeed, this is the very foundation of our moral responsibility. Cain's example should suffice here: "... Be careful, sin is crouching at the door ; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." (*Genesis 4:7*) God did not lie when he said this to a man after the fall. That means he had the capacity to do good. Cain sinned because he wanted to.

The fact that one can choose what is good and live a god-fearing life (which does not mean being sinless but does show that man is not totally depraved), can be amply seen in the exemplary lives of Enoch (*Genesis 5:22-24*), Noah (*Genesis 6:8-9*), Abraham, Moses, the prophets (*Hebrews 11*), as well as Elisabeth and Zachariah (*Luke 1:5-6*), and many others.

But why are we talking about this dark tragedy, about death, about the avalanche which was brought about by sin when what everybody is looking for is happiness and bliss? If we want to find true happiness, we first have to understand the depth and the weight of our sins. We have to abhor them in order to start longing for a Saviour. If people realize how much misery and destruction their sins cause, some, at least, start to make a desperate attempt to change. Then we learn how weak we are, even if we sometimes achieve partial success. We sigh:

Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death ? (*Romans 7:24*)

Where is he, why does the Saviour delay? Not everybody would put it like this. A god-fearing Jew perhaps would. An atheist may describe his unspoken search for God as a search for the meaning of life and longing for good. Others search for the purpose and meaning of life, despite the uncertainty of their existence, in the unfriendly darkness of the infinite universe, as a tiny creature:

My heart sits on the twig of nothing,
its little body shivering, dumb.
In calm unbroken gathering,
staring, staring, the stars come.
- József Attila: Without Hope [2]

A difficult process starts: facing reality. Will I escape or continue to face it? The shreds of my conscience get stronger through the longing for the good and testify: I cannot make my sins undone. A distressing result.

(Of course we often look for and “find” acceptable explanations for our sins and “warm-heartedly” forgive ourselves. Suppressing our conscience, wishing for false peace. But it is NEVER the same as the peace coming from the forgiveness of God.)

I feel like something has happened that I cannot restore, however hard I try. When I have lost the trust of a close friend, I cannot reclaim it, no matter how heroically I try. It depends exclusively on the good will of my friend. This is also plainly illustrated in the above-mentioned parable of the prodigal son. Only his father can accept him again and give him back his rights.

How much more it is like this with God? I can never come to him with the excuse that he should actually examine himself a bit, like I might do with a friend. But what can I say to the heavenly father who is patiently waiting for me — the stubborn, wayward son, to come back to him. (Luke 15). What could I tell him? He is perfectly good. He himself is love.

I can do nothing here but bow down and say, “Father, I have sinned against you.”

He alone—the one whom I despised, from whose love I turned away, from whom I alienated myself—he can make me free, he can heal our relationship, restore the trust, my sonship. He himself will be the Saviour.

This promise can already be found in the history of the Fall.

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel. (*Genesis 3:15*)

The offspring of the woman, the last Adam crushes the serpent’s head. This is the seed that grows from the root of David (*Isaiah 11:1-2!*), it will be a small flower, a small shoot who will be able to stop the avalanche of sins with his sinlessness; He will tear out sin’s sting by his obedience till death; He will bring us eternal life, restore what sin destroyed: perfect joy, harmony with God, with ourselves, with each other ...

Yes, Jesus Christ has done it!

The first man forfeited what God gave him because he wanted to be like God. The last Adam, Jesus Christ became the beginning (first fruit) of a new mankind, the author of new life by renouncing equality with God and emptying himself ...

... who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (*Philippians 2:6-11*)

Only by following him in his humility can we walk with him on the path to eternal life.

Your Email*

Your Message*

Send

Footnotes

1. Thus we do not consider it sensible in this context to discuss the question of “how” man’s existence began or the location of the Garden of Eden etc.
2. taken from https://www.magyarulbabelben.net/works/hu/József_Attila/Reménytelenül/en/3543-Without_Hope

Permission is granted to reproduce this article for personal use unchanged and complete only. Content may not be reproduced in any other form without written permission from www.christians.eu

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked "NASB" are taken from the NASB

Scripture quotations marked "NIV" are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com